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Reviewer

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**Sent:** Friday, February 08, 2008 9:22 AM  
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February 8, 2008

Madam Secretary,

I know you are wrestling with a number of very difficult issues involving my ever-congenial hosts, ranging from Kosovo to Bucharest to the next 2x2 meeting. Following are some personal thoughts on what's at stake with the Russians, what's driving them, and what may be possible over the next few months. I still think it's possible to make a big, strategic play with Putin in the Kremlin; it will get harder after he leaves in May, because Medvedev will be too weak initially to make bold choices, and Putin won't want to be seen to be making them for him. By that point, moreover, the Russian inclination will be simply to wait for the next Administration.

1. The next couple months will be among the most consequential in recent U.S.-Russian relations. We face three potential trainwrecks: Kosovo, MAP for Ukraine/Georgia, and missile defense. We've got a high-priority problem with Iran that (post-NIE) will be extremely hard to address without the Russians. We've got a chance to do something enduring with the Russians on nuclear cooperation, with a 123 agreement almost signed and more to be done on GNEP and counter-proliferation. And we've got an opportunity to get off on a better foot with a reconfigured Russian leadership after

Medvedev's likely election, and to help get the Russians across the finish line into WTO this year, which is among the most practical things we can do to promote the long-term prospects for political and economic modernization in this proud, prickly, complicated society.

2. My view is that we can only manage one of those three trainwrecks without doing real damage to a relationship we don't have the luxury of ignoring. From my admittedly parochial perspective here, it's hard to see how we could get the key Europeans to support us on all three at the same time. I'd opt for plowing ahead resolutely on Kosovo; deferring MAP for Ukraine or Georgia until a stronger foundation is laid; and going to Putin directly while he's still in the Presidency to try and cut a deal on missile defense, as part of a broader security framework.

3. I fully understand how difficult a decision to hold off on MAP will be. But it's equally hard to overstate the strategic consequences of a premature MAP offer, especially to Ukraine. Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In my more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests. At this stage, a MAP offer would be seen not as a technical step along a long road toward membership, but as throwing down the strategic gauntlet. Today's Russia will respond. Russian-Ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze, with Moscow likely to contemplate economic measures ranging from an immediate increase in gas prices to world market levels, to a clampdown on Ukrainian workers coming to Russia. It will create fertile soil for Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. There'd be much chest-thumping about repositioning military assets closer to the Ukrainian border, and threats of nuclear retargeting. The NATO-Russia Council would go on life support, or expire altogether. On Georgia, the combination of Kosovo independence and a MAP offer would likely lead to recognition of Abkhazia, however counterproductive that might be to Russia's own long-term interests in the Caucasus. The prospects of subsequent Russian-Georgian armed conflict would be high.

4. If, in the end, MAP offers are made to Ukraine and Georgia, you can probably stop reading here. I can conceive of no grand package that would allow the Russians to swallow this pill quietly. If we opt to defer MAP, while making clear that it is coming eventually, we have a chance to explore a strategically ambitious package with Russia, which could help anchor our relationship and some of our most significant global interests for some time to come. I do not mean to suggest that Putin and company would view a deferral of MAP as a great strategic concession and leap enthusiastically to greater moderation on other questions; they are not an especially sentimental bunch. But the way would at least be clear to probe for accommodations that would suit our most vital needs, and to find a way to agree to disagree on Kosovo without huge collateral damage.

5. I'd see two parts to a bold package of understandings to pursue with Putin. The first would be a security framework, and the second would be a renewed commitment to economic cooperation. The first would be a lasting contribution from both Presidents to a safer world and a reflection of the unique capabilities – and unique responsibilities – that the United States and Russia continue to have in the nuclear field. The second would be, over the medium and longer-term, the most effective means of advancing the President's freedom agenda, and a way to help lock Russia into global economic organizations and rule of law. That won't change the reality that Russia is a deeply authoritarian and overcentralized state today, whose dismal record on human rights and political freedoms deserves our criticism. But it will reinforce over time the instincts for private property and market-driven opportunity, and the vastly increased connections that young Russians have to the rest of the world through foreign travel and the Internet, that are slowly but unmistakably transforming this society.

6. A security framework might include several ingredients. Completion of a 123 agreement, progress on GNEP, and a common diplomatic approach on DPRK and Iran (following a third UNSCR) would be the starting point. A second component would revolve upon how we manage our own remaining nuclear arsenals. That means meeting Bratislava commitments on Nunn-Lugar upgrades by the end of 2008, and a Russian commitment to sustain them. It also means seeking an agreement in principle on post-START, involving a legally-binding text whose level of detail and shape would fall somewhere between the Moscow Treaty and START-I. (We might also consider support for Putin's global INF treaty, however slim the chances for success.) A third feature could be a reinvigoration of counterterrorism cooperation, including the new Global Initiative against Nuclear Terrorism, and greater Russian contributions in Afghanistan. And fourth, and most challenging, would be missile defense.

7. I don't know if Putin can be persuaded at this stage to do a deal on regional missile defense cooperation that would allow us to move ahead on Polish and Czech deployments. But it's still worth a try, if only as a way to show the Allies that we've exhausted every avenue. To make a dent in Putin's thinking, and overcome the objections that he's likely to hear from a deeply skeptical Russian bureaucracy, you and Secretary Gates would probably have to convey to Putin directly a revised U.S. paper, indicating a willingness to make a maximum effort to reach an understanding with the Russians before formalizing agreements with the Poles and Czechs (it wouldn't work to announce a deal during the Tusk visit to

Washington on March 10 and then try to reach an accommodation with Putin). We'd also have to go further in indicating a readiness to link operationalization of sites to concrete evidence of long-range missile capability (via flight testing), and in finding a formula for continuous mutual presence at each other's sites.

8. An economic basket would include a hard push on WTO, built around Kudrin's visit to Washington in April. It would also feature the launching of a new government to government economic dialogue in the spring, led by Rauben Jeffery and his Russian counterpart, and possible visits to Russia by Secretary Paulson and Secretary Gutierrez (with a renewed business to business dialogue emerging from the latter). The possible appointment of a new, high-level energy envoy for Eurasia could be another opportunity (especially if it was someone like Don Evans, whom the Russians know and trust).

9. Tactically, it would be essential to roll all this out as a really significant strategic play, conveyed at least in broad terms from the President to Putin. A piecemeal approach won't succeed. A first step might be a call to Putin from the President in the second half of February, maybe after the Africa trip but well before the March 2 Russian Presidential election. Then there could be a 2x2 meeting in Moscow, shortly after the election, to allow a detailed, direct engagement with Putin, Medvedev and others. To focus Putin's interest, the President might keep open the possibility of a brief stop in Moscow after Bucharest, if/when sufficient progress had been made. While the odds of success would be long, it's at least conceivable that the two Presidents could ultimately point to a security framework, including a missile defense understanding; a coordinated approach on Iran, following passage of a third UNSCR and the Majles elections; agreement to disagree on Kosovo; and significant movement on WTO. All that would protect our core interests, play to Putin's sense of legacy, and get relations with Medvedev off to a promising start. At worst, we'd have built up capital with the Allies for making such an effort, which we'd no doubt have to draw on to manage the fallout from Kosovo and missile defense.

10. I fully recognize that all this is much, much easier said than done. But even partial success would help cushion some of the trainwrecks that lie ahead, and help create an atmosphere in which eventual decisions on MAP might go down easier.

Best regards,

Bill Burns